

Message Text

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15

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 /075 W
----- 032065

R 240845Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3945

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

CINCPAC POLAD

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE COLOMBO 4083

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION AGAINST PM DEFEATED

REF: COLOMBO 3847 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE'S UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT DEFEATED OPPOSITION MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN HER BY 43-100 VOTE
DEC 23. ORIGINALLY INTRODUCED BY TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMAJA PARTY AND TINY SRI LANKA VIMUKTHI BALAVEGAYA MOTION WAS EVENTUALLY SUPPORTED HALF-HEARTEDLY BY OTHER TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES. IT ATTACKED PM'S PERSONAL LAND TRANSACTIONS JUST BEFORE ENACTMENT OF 1972 LAND REFORM BILL. PM AND HER MINISTERS ARGUED LAND SALES WERE MADE LEGALLY AND OPENLY, WHILE OPPOSITION SPOKESMEN INSISTED PM SHOULD BE ABOVE SUSPICION. WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY AND RESULTANT SUSPICIONS HAVE TARNISHED PM'S PERSONAL AND POLITICAL STANDING WITH PUBLIC. LSSP WILL ADD THIS CHARGE TO ITS CONTINUED ALLEGATIONS OF PERSONAL IMPROPRIETIES
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INCLUDING NEPOTISM, AGAINST PM. END SUMMARY.

2. AS ANTICIPATED, PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE EMERGED VICTORIOUS BUT SHE WAS NOT TOTALLY UNSCATHED IN 43-100 DEFEAT OF NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION IN LATE NIGHT DEC 23 VOTE.

3. WHILE SHE MANAGED TO HOLD ALL MEMBERS OF HER COALITION (OTHER THAN FIVE APPARENTLY LEGITIMATE ABSENCES) THE FOUR OPPOSITION PARTIES ALSO SHELVED THEIR DIFFERENCES AND PRESENTED UNITED FRONT OF THEIR OWN IN DECLARING THEIR LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN PM.

4. BASIS OF MOTION WAS ALLEGATION OF IMPROPER CONDUCT BY PM AND CHILDREN IN ENGAGING IN PERSONAL LAND SALES DURING WEEK IN 1972 JUST PRIOR TO ENACTMENT OF LAND REFORM BILL LIMITING LAND OWNERSHIP TO 50 ACRES (REFTEL). TO OUR KNOWLEDGE THIS WAS FIRST-EVER MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE AGAINST PRIME MINISTER PERSONALLY (AS OPPOSED TO AGAINST GOVERNMENT) IN HISTORY OF SRI LANKA.

5. PRIME MINISTER REBUTTED ARGUMENTS EMOTIONALLY AND LEFT IT TO HER MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND LANDS HECTOR KOBBEKADUWA TO RESPOND FACTUAL BASIS, SUPPORTED BY FINANCE MINISTER FELIX DIAS BANDARANAIKE AND COMMUNIST PARTY/ MOSCOW LEADER, PIETER KEUNEMAN. PM PROTESTED THAT SHE AND HER FAMILY HAD USED THEIR WEALTH OVER THE YEARS FOR BENEFIT OF COUNTRY AND TO PROPAGATE BANDARANAIKE POLITICAL IDEALS. SHE CITED HER FORFEITURE OF A TOTAL OF 2,000 ACRES TO LAND REFORM COMMISSION (LRC) AND ASKED WHEHER IT WAS REASONABLE THAT SHE WOULD HAVE TRIED TO ILLEGALLY TRANSFER MERE 82 ACRES.

6. KOBBEKADUWA PRESENTED DOCUMENTS TO EFFECT THAT SOME OF LAND SALES AT ISSUE HAD BEEN INITIATED IN 1969, WELL BEFORE LAND REFORM BILL HAD BEEN THOUGH OF AND WHILE MRS BANDARANAIKE WAS LEADER OF OPPOSITION. FURTHER, UNDER ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES, EXEMPTION HAD BEEN SOUGHT AND RECEIVED FROM LRC, MWJMITZHNG THESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TRANSACTIONS, ALREADY BEGUN, TO BE COMPLETED. SUCH EXEMPTIONS, HE POINTED OUT, WERE NOT UNIQUELY GRANTED TO PM. IN ALL, 5,150 SUCH CASES WERE ALLOWED AND 922 REJECTED.

7. TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) MEMBER AND FORMER MINISTER OF PLANTATION INDUSTRY COLVIN R. DE SILVA WAS MAIN SPEAKER FOR OPPOSITION. HE REPEATED

BASIC DETAILS OF LAND TRANSACTIONS (AS PREVIOUSLY
POUCHED TO DEPT), CITED THEIR QUESTIONABLE TIMING,
AND ARGUED THAT PM HAD IMPROPERLY USED HER FOREKNOWLEDGE
OF 50-ACRE LAND CEILING. HE PROTESTED THAT "THERE ARE
MANY THINGS PERMITTED TO ORDINARY MORTALS WHICH ARE
NOT PERMITTED TO A PRIME MINISTER.... TO ENTR INTO
DUBIOUS LAND TRANSACTIONS IS ONE OF THOSE MANY THINGS."

8. LSSP AND TWO MEMBER SRI LANKA VIMUKTHI BALAVEGAYA
WERE TWO ORIGINAL SPONSORS AND STRONGEST SUPPORTERS
OF NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION. ONE OF TWO FEDERAL (TAMIL COMMUNAL)
PARTY MP'S SPEAKING SHOWED NO INTEREST IN CONTENT OF MOTION
AND ANNOUNCED ONLY THAT HE HAD LOST CONFIDENCE IN PM
LONG AGO. UNITED NATIONAL PARTY, WHICH DECIDED TO
SUPPORT THE MOTION ONLY ON DAY OF VOTE, TRIED TO AMEND
MOTION TO MAKE IT ONE OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN UNITED FRONT
GOVT RATHER THAN IN PRIME MINISTER ALONE AND WAS
LUKEWARM IN SUPPORTING ORIGINAL MOTION. SPOKESMAN
JR JAYEWARDENE SAID HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED
APPOINTMENT OF SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE CHARGES
AGAINST PM.

9. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS PREMATURE TO ASSESS FULL
EFFECT OF ALLEGATIONS AND ASSEMBLY DEBATE, PM WAS PER-
SONALLY EMBARRASSED BY THIS REVELATION OF HER LAND
TRANSACTIONS AND POLITICALLY WEAKENED BY UNITED
OPPOSITION VOTE AGAINST HER. OPPOSITION AND
LSSP IN PARTICULAR, WILL CONTINUE TO USE THIS ISSUE
AS WELL AS OTHER ALLEGATIONS OF PERSONAL IMPROPRIETY
SUCH AS NEPOTISM, AGAINST PM, AS POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE
HEATS UP. AMONG GENERAL PUBLIC THIS ISSUE WILL
PROBABLY INCREASE SUSPICION OF GENERALLY SCANDAL-FREE
PRIME MINISTER. AFTER WEEKS OF IGNORING SUBJECT,
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NATIONAL MEDIA GAVE WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY DAY AFTER
VOTE. GOVT-ORIENTED-PRESS PRINTED FULL ASSEMBLY
DEBATE AND TEXT OF MOTION IN ISSUES OF DEC 24.
VAN HOLLEN

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

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TAGS: PINT, CE, (BANDARANAIKE, SIRIMAVO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006